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Introduction to *Poem of the Cid / Cantar de mio Cid*

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Spanish epic poetry narrates the legendary deeds of historical figures, horse-mounted warriors of flesh and blood, fighting for themselves, their reputations, their social standing, and for riches and fame. Unlike the imagined heroes of the English *Beowulf* or the French *Roland*, Rodrigo of Vivar lived and breathed the air of his Castilian homeland, subscribed charters, signed documents, married, fathered children, conquered the Muslim kingdom of Valencia and, on his death in 1099, bequeathed that kingdom to his wife, Doña Ximena. She ruled over Valencia for a time as well, until she was compelled to abandon it to an army of North-African Muslims. In the telling of his story some one hundred years after his death, Rodrigo's deeds of history are conflated with legendary battles and events to such a degree that it is fruitless to try to distinguish between them. The battles and the rivalries, the riches gained, the bonds of marriage, of friendship and allegiance, broken and reaffirmed, are all plausible, and in the exquisite thrill of hearing them told, it becomes evident that the principal concern of the poet, of this singer of tales, is to recreate heroic deeds as human drama.

The poem is preserved in a single manuscript, housed in the Biblioteca Nacional, the national library of Spain, with none of the editorial whimsy to be found in modern editions. The date that the poem was written down, not necessarily when the poem was first composed, is recorded at the very end of the manuscript, in what is termed the coda, as 1207 AD (1245 of the Spanish Era), which corresponds nicely to the world it depicts. This is then a poem that relates the deeds of a man who had died some one hundred years before, and although his greatest feat, the conquest and rule of Valencia, is a major theme in the poem, some of the smaller battles, the places where they occur, and the people depicted are no longer identifiable. Landscapes do change, and history has a way of forgetting its minor players, but we can imagine that for the author and the audience of the poem, their names and the places where they sought riches and renown were memorable. For us, some eight-hundred years later, the poem's depiction of battles and struggles, social norms and values, its expression and cadence, are intriguing and richly rewarding in their otherness and yet, at the same time, echo a faint familiarity.

Modern editors of the poem are not content to reproduce the poem as it has come down to us in its unique manuscript. They instead assume an imagined rhetorical structure for the poem that leads to the separation of each verse into two parts, termed hemistichs; they separate verses into segments, known as *tiradas*, that begin and end with a change of assonance—a simple rhyme scheme in which the stressed vowel of the last word in each verse is the same, or at least acoustically similar. The *tiradas* are then given numbers that run consecutively through the poem (1-152). Editors also divide the poem into three *cantares*, and some even divide the content further into numbered segments of thematically related content, each with its own descriptive title. Finally, in some of the most egregious interventions, words are added for clarification and to bolster rhythmic regularity, and end-words are altered in the pursuit of an assonance more perfect than what

the scribe recorded. It's a lot of baggage for a poem which, in manuscript form, simply presents one verse after another with variable assonance throughout.

Yet, reading the poem as it presents in the manuscript is a uniquely satisfying experience, even liberating (<https://miocid.wlu.edu>). Translations and editions of other medieval epics such as *Beowulf* and *Roland* are free of this kind of distracting editorial intervention, encouraging an intimate connection with the poems, their mode of composition, their manifestation on manuscript, and ideally, with their original audiences. The Cid narrative was composed one verse at a time, always moving forward, expressing one idea per verse, often employing rhyming stock phrases, the epic epithets that also serve to memorialize Rodrigo and the warriors dearest to him. Its uninterrupted flow is a testament to a narrative tradition of poets whose winged words engaged audiences for hundreds of years. We can of course enjoy the poem today because a single literate scribe placed it on parchment, most likely for the purpose of reading it aloud to an assembled audience.

The reason we still read the poem today, of course, is that it tells a story that we find inspiring, that of Rodrigo of Vivar, an eleventh-century Castilian warrior who was exceptionally successful in battle. He acquired great wealth and the honor and social status it conferred through intelligent, sometimes deceitful, strategies, and hard-fought battlefield victories. Although Rodrigo was of high social standing, he was exiled by his king and compelled to make a living in the badlands, which meant supporting himself and his army by raiding, killing, and exacting tribute from the ruling Muslim lords. Rodrigo's initial fall from grace creates a narrative arc that begins with his descent into near-despair, progresses through his travails and victories, and ends with the triumphal marriages of his two daughters to the heirs of the royal houses of Navarra and Aragón. In this way, the poem projects the virtues and values that guide and motivate Rodrigo and his band of loyal vassals to the highest levels of Castilian society.

Some of the more compelling passages from the poem illustrate these characteristics. In the first example, Rodrigo is seen struggling with his emotions as he leaves his wife and daughters under the protection of the abbot of the Castilian monastery of San Pedro de Cardeña, as he sets out to begin his exile:

El Çid a doña Ximena ívala abraçar,
doña Ximena al Çid la máno! va besar,
llorando de los ojos, que non sabe qué se far,
e él a las niñas tornólas a catar,

-A Dios vos acomiendo, fijas, e a la mugier e al
Padre spirital,
agora nos partimos, Dios sabe el ajuntar.-
Llorando de los ojos, que non viestes atal,
assís' parten unos d'otros commo la uña de la carne.

Mío Çid con los sos vassallos pensó de cavalgar,
a todos esperando, la cabeça tornando va,
a tan grand sabor fabló Minaya Álbar Fáñez,

The Cid went to embrace doña Jimena,
doña Jimena moves to kiss the Cid's hand,
weeping from her eyes, she does not know what to
do,
and he turned to look back at the girls,
-I entrust you to God, daughters, and to my wife
and to the spiritual Father,
we are parting now, God knows our reunion.-
Weeping from their eyes, such as you never saw,
they separate from each other as the fingernail from
the flesh.
My Cid got ready to ride with his vassals,
while all are waiting for him, he keeps turning his
head back,
Minaya Álvar Fáñez spoke with such propriety,

-Çid, ¿dó son vuestros esfuerços?, en buen ora
nasquiestes de madre,

pensem de ir nuestra vía, esto sea de vagar.
Aun todos estos duelos en gozo se tornarán,
Dios que nos dio las almas consejo nos dará.- (vv.
368-382)

-Cid, where is your strength? You were born of
your mother in a fortunate hour,
let's be on our way, set aside this grieving.
All these sorrows will yet turn to joy,
God who gave us our souls will give us aid.-

The battle for Alcocer offers a lesson in the Cid's use of deceitful tactics to conquer a Muslim town and take its wealth. The Cid is familiar enough with the Muslim Taifa rulers to be able to leverage their greed and rivalry to his advantage. In the passage, the Cid had laid siege to the town of Alcocer for seven weeks without success. He then decides to trick its inhabitants into believing that he and his men have run out of provisions, and are so weakened by the rigors of the siege that they must withdraw. He feigns a retreat, and when the men of the town see this, they rush out after him, hoping to seize the tribute he had exacted from them and other nearby towns before their neighbors learn of the Cid's vulnerability. In their haste, they leave the gates to the town wide open.

Veyénlo los de Alçoçer, ¡Dios, cómo se alabavan!
-Fallido á a mio Çid el pan e la çevada,
las otras abés lieva, una tienda á dexada,
de guisa va mio Çid commo si escapasse de
arrancada.
Demos salto a él e feremos grant ganança,
antes quel' prendan los de Teruel, si non, non nos
darán dent nada,
la paria qu'él á presa tornárnosla ha doblada.
Salieron de Alçoçer a una priessa much estraña,
mio Çid, quando los vio fuera, cogió's commo de
arrancada,
cojós' Salón ayuso, con los sos abuelta anda.
Dizen los de Alçoçer, -¡Ya se nos va la ganança!
Los grandes e los chicos fuera salto dan,
al sabor del prender, de lo ál non piensan nada,
abiertas dexan las puertas, que ninguno non las
guarda.
El buen Campeador la su cara tornava,
vio que entr'ellos e el castiello mucho avié grand
plaça,
mandó tornar la seña, apriessa espoloneavan,
-¡Firdlos, cavalleros, todos sines dubdança,
con la merçed del Criador, nuestra es la ganança!
Bultos son con ellos por medio de la llana,
¡Dios, qué bueno es el gozo por aquesta mañana!
(vv. 580-600)

Those of Alcocer saw this, God, how they
congratulated themselves!
-My Cid's bread and barley has run out,
he can barely carry the others, he has left one tent,
my Cid moves as if he were escaping from a rout.
Let's go after him and we'll make lots of money,
before those of Teruel capture him, if not, they'll
give us none of it,
the tribute he has seized we'll get back twofold.-
They shot out from Alcocer in a bizarre rush,
my Cid, when he saw them outside, took off as if in
retreat,
he took off down the Jalón, together with his men
he rides.
Those from Alcocer say, -Our spoils are getting
away!-
The big and the small charge out,
excited about the capture, they don't think about
anything else,
open they leave the gates, as no one guards them.
The good Campeador turned his head around,
he saw that between them and the castle there was a
great distance,
he ordered the banner turned, quickly they spurred,
-Strike them, knights, all of you fearlessly,
with the help of the Creator, the booty is ours!-
They clash with them in the middle of the plain,
God, how great is the joy this morning!

The Cid's conquest of the Muslim kingdom of Valencia is certainly the crowning act of his historical triumphs. In the poem it also seems to represent his greatest achievement and the point at which his good fortune is secured. The Cid's joy is greatest when his wife and daughters are allowed to join him in Valencia and see for themselves his glorious achievements and the great wealth and status he has achieved for himself and for them.

Oíd lo que dixo el que en buen ora nasco,
-Vós, querida e ondrada mugier, e amas mis fijas,
mi coraçón e mi alma,
entrad comigo en Valençia la casa,
en esta heredad que vos yo he ganada.-
Madre e fijas las manos le besavan,
a tan grand ondra ellas a Valençia entravan.
Adeliñó mio Çid con ellas al alcáçar,
allá las subié en el más alto logar.
Ojos vellidos catan a todas partes,
miran Valençia, cómmo jaze la çibdad,
e del otra parte a ojo han el mar,
miran la huerta, espessa es e grand,
alçan las manos pora Dios rogar
d'esta ganança, cómmo es buena e grand.
(vv. 1603-1617)

Hear what said he who was born in a fortunate hour,
-You, dear and honorable wife, and both my girls,
my heart and my soul,
enter with me into Valencia the town,
into this domain that I have won for you.-
Mother and daughters kissed his hands,
with such great honor into Valencia they entered.
My Cid headed with them to the alcazar,
there he took them up to the highest spot.
Beautiful eyes look around on all sides,
they see Valencia, how the city stretches out,
and from the other side they have the sea within sight,
they see the orchard, it is dense and immense,
they raise their hands to praise God
for this wealth, how good and great it is.

This culminating moment is only the beginning of a drama of a different nature. The Cid and his family are back together in Valencia, and all seems well, but the king is not through with them yet. The Cid's wealth and success have caught the attention of one of the more prominent families in Castile, and their young heirs, known as the Infantes de Carrion, Diego and Fernando González, have their sights set on a life of leisure and privilege at the expense of the Cid. They ask the king for his help in securing their marriages to the Cid's daughters, Elvira and Sol. The Cid had hoped to seek out appropriate marriages for his daughters himself, but reluctantly agrees with the king's request. The events that follow their marriage are a tragic unraveling of the Cid's hard-won success, and in order to again restore his honor and status the Cid must summon even greater resolve and resourcefulness than in his battlefield victories.

The first hint that his sons-in-law are not up to the tasks expected of them as men of arms, is glimpsed in an episode in which the Cid's courage and exceptionalism are on full display.

En Valençia seí mio Çid con todos sus vassallos,
con él amos sus yernos, los ifantes de Carrión.
Yaziés' en un escaño, durmié el Campeador,
mala sobrevienta, sabed, que les cuntió,
saliós' de la red e desatós' el león.
En grant miedo se vieron por medio de la cort,
enbraçan los mantos los del Campeador,
e çercan el escaño e fíncan sobre so señor.
Ferrán Gonçález non vio allí dó s'alçasse, nin
cámara abierta nin torre,

In Valencia was my Cid with all his vassals,
with him both his sons-in-law, the infantes of Carrión.
Lying on a bench, the Campeador was sleeping,
a dangerous incident, mind you, befell them,
the lion escaped from his cage and got loose.
In great fear they found themselves throughout the
court,
the Campeador's men shield themselves with their
mantles,

metiós' so'l escaño, tanto ovo el pavor,
Diego Gonçález por la puerta salió,
diziendo de la boca, -¡Non veré Carrión!-
Tras una viga lagar metiós' con grant pavor,
el manto e el brial todo suzio lo sacó.
En esto despertó el que en buen ora naçió,
vio çercado el escaño de sus buenos varones,
-¿Qué's esto, mesnadas, o qué queredes vós?-
-Ya señor ondrado, rebata nos dio el león.-
Mio Çid fincó el cobdo, en pie se levantó,
el manto trae al cuello e adeliñó pora'l león.
El león, quando lo vio, assí envergonçó,
ante mio Çid la cabeça premió e el rostro fincó.
Mio Çid don Rodrigo al cuello lo tomó,
e lívalo adestrando, en la red le metió.
(vv. 2278-2301)

and they surround the bench and stand over their
lord.
Fernán González did not see where he might hide, no
open room nor tower,
he got under the bench, he had such fear,
Diego González went out the door,
saying from his mouth, -I won't see Carrión!-
Behind a wine press he went with great fear,
he came out with his mantle and his tunic all dirty.
Just then awoke he who was born in a fortunate hour,
he saw the bench surrounded by his good men,
-What's this, men, what is it you want?-
-Oh honorable lord, the lion gave us a scare.-
My Cid set his elbow, he rose to his feet,
his mantle he holds at his neck and he headed for the
lion.
The lion, when he saw him, immediately bowed down,
before my Cid he lowered his head and buried his
face.
My Cid don Rodrigo took him by the neck,
and leads him along, and placed him in the cage.

The episode leads to discord between the Cid and his men. As they mock his sons-in-law, the Cid is compelled to silence them. Other incidents portray Diego and Fernando as cowards and schemers, resolving finally in a plan to take the daughters of the Cid away from Valencia where they will be free to exact revenge for the humiliation they suffered in the Cid's court. Once alone with Elvira and Sol, they beat them senseless and leave them to die alone in the ancient oak forest of Corpes. The Cid's nephew, Féléz Muñoz, who was sent by the Cid to keep an eye on his cousins, senses betrayal and sneaks away from the entourage to find his cousins unconscious and near death, with the sun setting in the woods, fearful that his absence will soon be noticed.

Vanse los ifantes, aguijan a espolón,
por el rastro tornós' Féléz Muñoz,
falló sus primas amortecidas amas a dos.
Llamando, -¡Primas, primas!-, luego descavalgó,
arrendó el cavallo, a ellas adeliñó,
-Ya primas, las mis primas, don Elvira e doña Sol,
mal se ensayaron los ifantes de Carrión,
a Dios plega e a Santa María que dent prendan ellos
mal galardón.-
Valas tornando a ellas amas a dos,
tanto son de traspuestas que non pueden dezir
nada.
Partiéronsele las telas de dentro del coraçón,
llamando, -¡Primas, primas, don Elvira e doña Sol!
¡Despertedes, primas, por amor del Criador,
mientras es el día, ante que entre la noch,

The infantes ride past, they spur on,
Féléz Muñoz turned back along their trail,
he found each of his two cousins half dead.
Calling, -Cousins, cousins!-, quickly he dismounted,
he hitched his horse, he headed for them,
-Oh cousins, my cousins, doña Elvira and doña Sol,
the infantes of Carrión proved themselves poorly,
may it please God and Holy Mary that they receive
punishment for this.-
He turns each of them over,
they felt so faint that they cannot say anything.
His heart strings were torn from deep within,
calling, -Cousins, cousins, doña Elvira and doña Sol!
Wake up, cousins, for the love of the Creator,
while it's day, before night comes,
don't let the fierce animals eat us in this wood!-
Doña Elvira and doña Sol are reviving,

los ganados fieros non nos coman en aqueste
mont!-
Van recordando don Elvira e doña Sol,
abrieron los ojos e vieron a Félez Muñoz,
-¡Esforçadvos, primas, por amor del Criador!
De que non me fallaren los ifantes de Carrión,
a grant priessa seré buscado yo,
si Dios non nos vale, aquí morremos nós.- (vv.
2775-2795)

they opened their eyes and saw Félez Muñoz,
-Try your best, cousins, for the love of the Creator!

As soon as the infantes of Carrión notice I'm
missing,
I will be sought with great urgency,
if God doesn't help us, we will die here.-

The Cid's daughters are returned to him and he and his men will demand justice from the king, as the party responsible for the marriage proposal. The king calls the most prominent lords from throughout his kingdom to court, and presides over the trial while the Cid makes his case for restitution and ultimately, for justice. As the proceedings are concluding, with judicial combat looming as the final arbiter of right and wrong, the heirs to the kingdoms of Navarra and Aragón arrive at the court to petition for the right to marry the Cid's daughters. These historical marriages convey the final judgment on the stature of the Cid, who began in exile, dispossessed of home and family, and here exults as the father of the brides of the future kings of Navarra and Aragón (vv. 3392-3405).

As the poem concludes, justice has been served and the Cid's daughters are now free from their tainted marriages with the Infantes de Carrión, the Cid can marry them as he wishes, to the princes of Navarra and Aragón. This is the final triumph of the 'salido de Castiella' ['the exile from Castile'] (v. 955).

Ved cuál ondra creçe al que en buen ora naçió,
quando señoras son sus hijas de Navarra e de
Aragón,
oy los reyes d'España sos parientes son,
a todos alcança ondra por el que en buen ora naçió.
(vv. 3722-3725)

See how honor grows for him who was born in a
fortunate hour,
now that his daughters are the princesses of
Navarre and Aragon,
today the kings of Spain are their relatives,
honor reaches all of them through him who was
born in a fortunate hour.

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